Hemispheric Digital Constellations

Performing in the Americas

Marcela Fuentes, Author

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Collective Mapping: Iconoclasistas

Since their beginning in 2003, the Iconoclasistas have used graphic design and layout techniques to draw attention to the issues that affect different communities in contemporary Latin America. Like in the case of the Transborder Tool, the practices carried out by the Iconoclasistas can be defined as tactical media and more precisely as part of the copyleft movement. The posters, flyers, maps, and stickers designed by the members of Iconoclasistas can be downloaded from their website, presented as an Agit 2.0 site.

Their name draws from "iconoclast," but instead of referring to those who destroy religious icons in order to dismantle oppressive ideologies, "iconoclassist" designates a tactic that embraces the graphic and visual arts to give visibility to conflicts along class lines: labor exploitation, displacement, police violence, and other abuses which also include gender and race. Besides their online presence in YouTube, Twitter, Facebook, and their own blog, the Iconoclasistas share their tactical media techniques live, working with social movements and unions to elaborate materials that can be used in public demonstrations and campaigns.

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Iconoclasistas also organizes collective mapping workshops with communities in areas distant from the capital city of Argentina, Buenos Aires, providing an opportunity for those who are far from the city to voice their concerns and organize. The Iconoclasistas participate in different circuits — artistic, activist, academic — nationally and internationally, addressing issues of gentrification, labor exploitation, land dispossession, police violence, sexual exploitation, and environmental contamination, amongst others.

The collective mapping workshops start with "provocations" or questions about the differential allocation of resources in a given area, the impact of factories and sites of transnational exploitation in the environment, the presence of repressive forces, and the location of community-organizing groups. In response to simple questions addressing the way in which different geographic scales are embedded within each other — global, national, community, and body — the participants of the collective mapping sessions intervene in official cartographies of the places where they live, adding codified signs designed by Iconoclasistas as well as their own markings.

Contrary to traditional geographical maps of a territory represented through aerial views, workshop participants produce maps that are instead grassroots depictions of social processes viewed from ground level, thus inserting the dimension of cultural agency into the cartographies of power. Simple icons such as arrows identify the flows of displaced communities and the settlement of corporate businesses.

The collective maps use the scale of the body as the main tool from which to lay out the bigger picture: What is placed on the maps by the workshop participants comes from knowledge based on their sensorial experience in situ. What participants came into contact with through their everyday experiences becomes an icon or a marking on the map by way of a virtual zooming in procedure. This practice also entails a temporal register, as participants resort to memory to identify lost places that were replaced by new businesses and factories.

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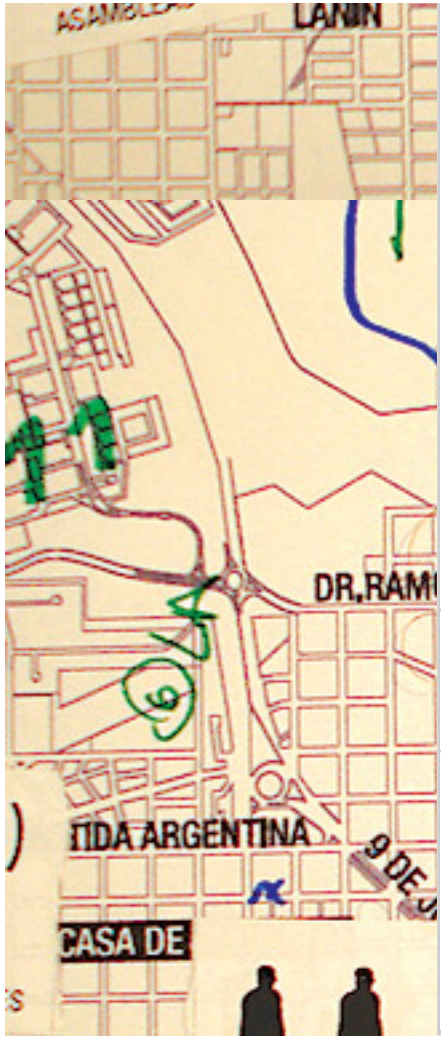

In the Iconoclasistas' maps, an exercise in abstraction — mapping in two dimensions — becomes a tool to empower agents so that they can intervene in the realities that affect them. Creativity is utilized in these performances as an amplifying device, making interventions reach levels of intensity that go beyond the anticipated capacity of their agents. In them, cultural agents appropriate media through different performances that put into question the determination of which activities correspond to whom according to different spheres of action.

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